

A celebrated essayist has said, "there is only one event in life which really astonishes a man and startles him out of his prepared opinions."

From my earliest recollections, even from the golden morning of my boyhood, I had been constructing in the realms of imagination my ideal of a life partner and friend. From every source visible, available and imaginary I gathered material with which to build and garnish.

To develop this object, the chisel of choice had been so continuously employed as to become bright and shining like burnished silver. The imagination had dipped her brush in colors rich and extraordinary.

My concept was so clear and clever, my idol had been erected with such deliberation and care as to preclude all apprehension of surprise or "astonishment." The occasion was one of profound interest. A convocation of ecclesiastics had assembled in a typical Southern city to review its work and to inaugurate plans and establish enterprises for the moral and spiritual uplift of humanity. The conference was to be introduced with a sermon by one of the chief ministers of the church.

The bishop who was to occupy the pulpit was the idol of his denomination and was admired and courted by other denominations as well. A celebrated statesman and military general said of this minister: "He is the only perfect man mentally, physically and spiritually that I have ever met."

The magnificent church edifice in which we were assembled was located on a high and picturesque spot. With high expectations and with faces all aglow the multitudes were crowding the spacious building from gallery to dress circle.

With simple but elegant manner the great preacher entered the church and moved with unflinching step through the long aisle and ascended the holy place. Every eye was turned upon that form of jovian majesty and that unsullied face of classic beauty. With reverence and humility he knelt in silent prayer. The great congregation seemed to realize that one sent of God, a prince and a prophet, was among them and we were awed into decorous silence. With ease and grace the speaker arose and with voice solemn, but melodious and eloquent, announced the opening hymn.

In all my experience I do not recall the occasion when my mind was so filled with admiration or when my heart was so thrilled with anticipation of a refined and wholesome feast of things spiritual and eternal.

Just at this moment my attention was diverted and riveted by the soft steps and the rustling silks of one who was being seated in an adjacent pew.

Turning to my right, there met my "astonished" gaze the one of whom I

had dreamed from the halcyon and simple days of my youth. Never before had my eyes beheld this "rare and radiant maiden." I knew not that she lived, but to my creative and ever vigilant imagination she was no stranger. Every fibre of my being caught fire. Gone were all my anticipations of a thrilling sermon from the distinguished prelate. The splendor of his personality, the light that flashed from his dancing eyes, the rhythm of his melodious voice had all vanished or been eclipsed by the unexpected appearance of another sight.

I do not recall hymn, or text or sermon! It was said that the eloquence of the great orator was like the incessant roll of thunder. There were enthusiastic expressions of admiration and sympathy as the preacher in his portrayal of Heavenly things rose to the sublime heights of sacred eloquence. But the object that met my admiring gaze occupied all my thoughts. I was reverent and attentive but the questions which are always the inevitable sequence of such an experience were chasing each other like racers through my mind.

The service ended and the assembly dispersed, and the object of my profoundest solicitude and inquiry vanished. How to secure the desired information become an absorbing problem.

After all, the impression might be only a capricious fancy, or the person might be a forbidden treasure.

The time for the adjournment of the convention was rapidly approaching. I had no clew to name, relation or habitation. There was no guiding star, not one ray of light to relieve the perplexing mystery.

With unfeigned hesitation and deep apprehension, as I now remember, ignoring all conventionalities and forgetting even to be ingenious I revealed my secret and exposed my fatal wound to my grey-haired host, who unhesitatingly informed me that the fair lady was the admired of all admirers in the town of "M," and believing that there were no less than twenty victims of cupid's shafts who would give the undertakers employment in less than twenty-four hours, he would advise me not to wait until the adjournment of the conference but to hasten my escape. He closed his warning by saying:

"Having learned that there is a possibility of your entering the contest for this coveted prize, if I could call back a few years I would instantly take your life."

My deliberate reply was: "I regard no man, I fear no weapons, and I now inform you that I will win her heart and hand if I have to compass sea and land."

AND I WON HER.